

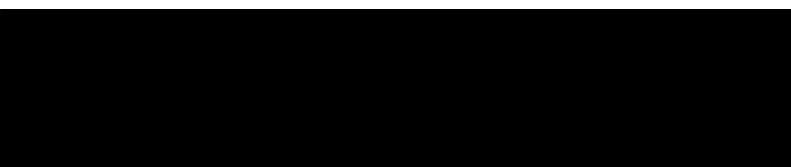
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Office: VERMONT SERVICE CENTER

Date: DEC 21 2005

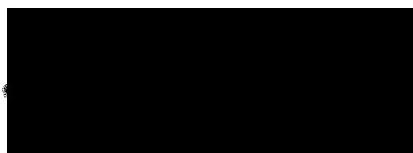
IN RE:

Petitioner: [REDACTED]

Beneficiary: [REDACTED]

PETITION: Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker as a Member of the Professions Holding an Advanced Degree or an Alien of Exceptional Ability Pursuant to Section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:



INSTRUCTIONS:

This is the decision of the Administrative Appeals Office in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

[Handwritten signature]
Robert P. Wiemann, Director
Administrative Appeals Office

DISCUSSION: The Director, Vermont Service Center denied the preference visa petition. The director reaffirmed his decision on motion. The matter is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a software development and computer consulting business. It seeks to employ the beneficiary permanently in the United States as a software engineer pursuant to section 203(b)(2) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(2). In pertinent part, section 203(b)(2) of the Act provides immigrant classification to members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent and whose services are sought by an employer in the United States. As required by statute, the petition was accompanied by certification from the Department of Labor. In both decisions, the director determined that the petitioner had not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the beneficiary the proffered wage beginning on the priority date of the visa petition and denied the petition accordingly.

On appeal, counsel submits a brief.

The regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) states, in pertinent part:

Ability of prospective employer to pay wage. Any petition filed by or for an employment-based immigrant which requires an offer of employment must be accompanied by evidence that the prospective United States employer has the ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner must demonstrate this ability at the time the priority date is established and continuing until the beneficiary obtains lawful permanent residence. Evidence of this ability shall be in the form of copies of annual reports, federal tax returns, or audited financial statements.

The petitioner must demonstrate the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, the day the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing by any office within the employment system of the Department of Labor. *See* 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(d). Here, the Form ETA 750 was accepted for processing on August 21, 2001. The proffered wage as stated on the Form ETA 750 is \$78,000 annually. On the Form ETA 750B, signed by the beneficiary, the beneficiary claimed to have worked for the petitioner as of February 2001.

On the petition, the petitioner claimed to have an establishment date in 2000, a gross annual income of \$275,000, no net income and seven employees. In support of the petition, the petitioner submitted its 2001 tax return and bank statements for August 2001 and January 2004.

On December 7, 2004, the director denied the petition, concluding that the petitioner's net income and net current assets in 2001 were insufficient to establish the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage in that year. The director further concluded that two bank statements showing balances in two months years apart were insufficient evidence of a sustained ability to pay the proffered wage.

The petitioner filed a motion to reopen. In support of the motion, the petitioner submitted (1) its tax returns for 2002 and 2003, (2) the beneficiary's Forms W-2 for 2001 and 2002 issued by the petitioner, (3) a Form W-2 issued to the beneficiary by a different company in 2003, (4) the beneficiary's pay stubs at the petitioning company for 2004, (5) the petitioner's bank statements for January 2001 through November 2004, (6) the tax returns for the petitioner's shareholders and (7) evidence of the petitioner's line of credit.

The Forms W-2 issued by the petitioner reflect wages of \$39,284.54 in 2001 and \$13,256.29 in 2002. As of November 30, 2004, the petitioner had paid the beneficiary year to date wages of \$44,635.70. Thus, the difference between wages paid and the proffered wage in 2001, 2002 and 2004 are \$38,715.46, \$64,743 and \$33,364.30 respectively. Thus, the petitioner must demonstrate the ability to pay those differences in those years. In 2003, the petitioner must establish its ability to pay the full proffered wage as the beneficiary was paid by another entity. The tax returns provide the following information:

	2001	2002	2003
Net income	\$8,378	(\$5,939)	\$2,645
Current Assets	\$40,343	\$24,090	\$34,502
Current Liabilities	\$16,897	\$29,952	\$387
Net current assets	\$23,446	(\$5,862)	\$34,115

The director determined that the evidence submitted did not establish that the petitioner had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date, and, on February 16, 2005, reaffirmed the decision denying the petition.

On appeal, counsel lists the evidence that was submitted with the previous motion to reopen, noting the cash assets of the petitioner listed on the tax returns, schedules L. Counsel further asserts that where a Chapter S corporation has utilized the assets of the shareholders in the past, it is reasonable to assume that the shareholders will continue to contribute assets when needed.

Counsel's reliance on the balances in the petitioner's bank accounts is misplaced. First, bank statements are not among the three types of evidence, enumerated in 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2), required to illustrate a petitioner's ability to pay a proffered wage. While this regulation allows additional material "in appropriate cases," the petitioner in this case has not demonstrated why the documentation specified at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2) is inapplicable or otherwise paints an inaccurate financial picture of the petitioner. Second, bank statements show the amount in an account on a given date, and cannot show the sustainable ability to pay a proffered wage. Third, no evidence was submitted to demonstrate that the funds reported on the petitioner's bank statements somehow reflect additional available funds that were not reflected on its tax return, such as the cash specified on Schedule L that will be considered below in determining the petitioner's net current assets. We note that the balances fluctuate up and down, with a low of \$8,226.11 in November 2003 and a high of \$92,925.71 in November 2004. The balances do not reflect an increase of \$64,753.71 (or even balances of that amount) during 2002 or the full \$78,000 in 2003.

Counsel's reliance on the assets of the shareholders is not persuasive. Regardless of past activity by the shareholders, a corporation, including a Chapter S corporation, is a separate and distinct legal entity from its owners or stockholders. See *Matter of Tessel*, 17 I&N Dec. 631 (Act. Assoc. Comm. 1980); *Matter of Aphrodite Investments Limited*, 17 I&N Dec. 530 (Comm. 1980); *Matter of M-*, 8 I&N Dec. 24 (BIA 1958; A.G. 1958). Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) will not consider the financial resources of individuals or entities who have no legal obligation to pay the wage. See *Sitar Restaurant v. Ashcroft*, 2003 WL 22203713, *3 (D. Mass. Sept. 18, 2003).

In calculating the ability to pay the proffered salary, CIS will not augment the petitioner's net income or net current assets by adding in the corporation's credit limits, bank lines, or lines of credit. A "bank line" or "line of credit" is a bank's unenforceable commitment to make loans to a particular borrower up to a specified

maximum during a specified time period. A line of credit is not a contractual or legal obligation on the part of the bank. *See Barron's Dictionary of Finance and Investment Terms*, 45 (1998).

The petitioner's line of credit will not be considered for two reasons. First, since the line of credit is a "commitment to loan" and not an existent loan, the beneficiary has not established that the unused funds from the line of credit are available at the time of filing the petition. As noted above, a petitioner must establish eligibility at the time of filing; a petition cannot be approved at a future date after the petitioner becomes eligible under a new set of facts. *See Matter of Katigbak*, 14 I&N Dec. 45, 49 (Comm. 1971). Second, the petitioner's existent loans will be reflected in the balance sheet provided in the tax return or audited financial statement and will be fully considered in the evaluation of the corporation's net current assets. Comparable to the limit on a credit card, the line of credit cannot be treated as cash or as a cash asset. However, if the petitioner wishes to rely on a line of credit as evidence of ability to pay, the petitioner must submit documentary evidence, such as a detailed business plan and audited cash flow statements, to demonstrate that the line of credit will augment and not weaken its overall financial position. Finally, CIS will give less weight to loans and debt as a means of paying salary since the debts will increase the firm's liabilities and will not improve its overall financial position. Although lines of credit and debt are an integral part of any business operation, CIS must evaluate the overall financial position of a petitioner to determine whether the employer is making a realistic job offer and has the overall financial ability to satisfy the proffered wage. *See Matter of Great Wall*, 16 I&N Dec. 142 (Acting Reg. Comm. 1977).

Where the petitioner has submitted the requisite initial documentation required in the regulation at 8 C.F.R. § 204.5(g)(2), CIS will first examine whether the petitioner employed and paid the beneficiary during the relevant period. If the petitioner establishes by documentary evidence that it employed the beneficiary at a salary equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the evidence will be considered *prima facie* proof of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. In the instant case, the petitioner did not establish that it employed and paid the beneficiary the full proffered wage in any year.

If the petitioner does not establish that it employed and paid the beneficiary an amount at least equal to the proffered wage during that period, CIS will next examine the net income figure reflected on the petitioner's federal income tax return, without consideration of depreciation or other expenses. Reliance on federal income tax returns as a basis for determining a petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage is well established by judicial precedent. *Elatos Restaurant Corp. v. Sava*, 632 F. Supp. 1049, 1054 (S.D.N.Y. 1986) (citing *Tongatapu Woodcraft Hawaii, Ltd. v. Feldman*, 736 F.2d 1305 (9th Cir. 1984)); *see also Chi-Feng Chang v. Thornburgh*, 719 F. Supp. 532 (N.D. Texas 1989); *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. 1080 (S.D.N.Y. 1985); *Ubeda v. Palmer*, 539 F. Supp. 647 (N.D. Ill. 1982), *aff'd*, 703 F.2d 571 (7th Cir. 1983). Showing that the petitioner's gross receipts exceeded the proffered wage is insufficient. Similarly, showing that the petitioner paid wages in excess of the proffered wage is insufficient. In *K.C.P. Food Co., Inc. v. Sava*, 623 F. Supp. at 1084, the court held that the Immigration and Naturalization Service, now CIS, had properly relied on the petitioner's net income figure, as stated on the petitioner's corporate income tax returns, rather than the petitioner's gross income. The court specifically rejected the argument that the Service should have considered income before expenses were paid rather than net income.

Nevertheless, the petitioner's net income is not the only statistic that can be used to demonstrate a petitioner's ability to pay a proffered wage. If the net income the petitioner demonstrates it had available during that period, if any, added to the wages paid to the beneficiary during the period, if any, do not equal the amount of the proffered wage or more, CIS will review the petitioner's assets. We reject, however, any argument that the petitioner's total assets should have been considered in the determination of the ability to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner's total assets include depreciable assets that the petitioner uses in its business.

Those depreciable assets will not be converted to cash during the ordinary course of business and will not, therefore, become funds available to pay the proffered wage. Further, while counsel requests that we consider only the petitioner's cash assets, the petitioner's assets must be balanced by the petitioner's liabilities. Otherwise, they cannot properly be considered in the determination of the petitioner's ability to pay the proffered wage. Rather, CIS will consider *net current assets* as an alternative method of demonstrating the ability to pay the proffered wage.

Net current assets are the difference between the petitioner's current assets and current liabilities.¹ A corporation's year-end current assets are shown on Schedule L, lines 1(d) through 6(d). Its year-end current liabilities are shown on lines 16(d) through 18(d). If a corporation's end-of-year net current assets are equal to or greater than the proffered wage, the petitioner is expected to be able to pay the proffered wage out of those net current assets.

The petitioner has not demonstrated that it paid the full proffered wage in 2001, 2002, 2003 or 2004. As stated above, the petitioner must demonstrate its ability to pay the following amounts: \$38,715.46 in 2001, \$64,743.71 in 2002, \$78,000 in 2003 and approximately \$33,364.30² in 2004. In 2001, the petitioner shows a net income of only \$8,378, net current assets of only \$23,446 and has not, therefore, demonstrated the ability to pay the difference between the wage paid and the proffered wage out of its net income or net current assets. In 2002, the petitioner shows a net loss and negative net current assets. In 2003, the petitioner shows a net income of only \$2,645 and net current assets of \$34,115. The record lacks financial documents for 2004 as the appeal was filed in March 2005. The petitioner has not satisfactorily demonstrated that any other funds were available to pay the proffered wage. The petitioner has not, therefore, shown the ability to pay the proffered wage during 2001 or subsequently. Therefore, the petitioner has not established that it had the continuing ability to pay the proffered wage beginning on the priority date.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. The petitioner has not met that burden.

ORDER: The appeal is dismissed.

¹ According to *Barron's Dictionary of Accounting Terms* 117 (3rd ed. 2000), "current assets" consist of items having (in most cases) a life of one year or less, such as cash, marketable securities, inventory and prepaid expenses. "Current liabilities" are obligations payable (in most cases) within one year, such accounts payable, short-term notes payable, and accrued expenses (such as taxes and salaries). *Id.* at 118.

² Any amounts paid to the beneficiary in December could be subtracted from this amount.